

## SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION 2020

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On December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX proclaimed the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. He announced, “*We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which asserts that the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, savior of the human race, was preserved free from every stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.*”

This truth is what we celebrate today: The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of our Mother Mary. The feast occurs every December 8. It is a celebration of the mystery of Mary born without the stain of original sin, in preparation to become the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a singular grace and privilege given to Mary by God from the moment of her conception.

The first reading of Today from Genesis 3 is the story of the fall of man, the fall of Adam. Following the realization of their sin, Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness. When they heard God in the garden, they were afraid, they ran and hid themselves. Therefore, sin exposes us; it makes us realize how naked we are; it sows in us, fear and pushes us away from God; it makes us want to hide from him.

Sin does no good to no one: both man, woman and serpent became accursed. The battle between good and evil is foreseen. “I will put enmity,” God declares, “between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.” Good at the end, however, will always triumph.

Now, the Hebrew word for Eve is *Havah*. It is connected to the word *Hayah* which means living and *Hay*, which means Life. Eve was so named because she became the mother of all the living. But because of the fall, however, death came. In Mary, new life is born; hence she becomes the new Eve, the new *Havah*.

In the gospel, God unveils His choice of the New Eve, to undo the failure of the First Eve. Mary, therefore, becomes the mother of the Messiah, the offspring who will crush the head of the serpent. She becomes the mother of the new people of God.

The first word of the Angel to Mary was *Chaire* (pronounced Kai-reh). This is a special greeting which means “*rejoice, be glad, be delighted or hail.*” The imperative *chaire* was used in the sense of God doing something special for his people (cf. Zeph. 3:14, Zech. 9:9; Joel 2:21; Matt. 26:49). The special and unique message from God to Mary is that through the Holy Spirit, she will conceive and bear a Son, the Son of God, whose name would be Jesus. Mary was so chosen because God highly favored her. The angel said, “*Hail, highly favored one ... you have found favor with God.*”

Mary’s response to the message of God reveals a young girl who was completely dedicated to the will of God. she says, “*I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done.*” Although she was prepared at conception for this moment, she however still cooperated with the grace of God in her. Hence, she becomes an example of holiness and absolute reliance on God and His Spirit.

Paul in the second reading blesses God for sending every spiritual blessing and for choosing us from the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love, and to be adopted sons and daughters of God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3-12).

So, we are reminded of our call in Christ to be holy and blameless like Mary is through her association with Christ. Despite the challenge of sin as was experienced by Eve, if we commit ourselves to associate with Christ and his mission, sin cannot have the last word. God desires us in Christ Jesus to be His sons and daughters. He is willing and able to restore us to his original plan for us, which is that we should be holy and blameless, and live for his praise and glory.

As we celebrate Mary's immaculate conception, we celebrate the gift of holiness and the restoration of life as the antidote to corruption and death which sin occasioned. We must remember, therefore, that our true life is in holiness, while sin which seems to promise life, only leads to death. We ask Mary our Mother, to pray for us today to associate ourselves always with Christ as we journey through life.